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editorial

Climate justice, food insecurity and social work

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Introduction

Food continues to be used as a weapon of war and as a weapon of colonisation (McLafferty Bell, 2024; Rao and Kaiser, 2025). I did not imagine that the politics of food would be suddenly thrust into the global spotlight by the eruption and escalation of geopolitical wars, conflicts and humanitarian crises when we proposed guest editing this special issue of *Critical and Radical Social Work* (*CRSW*) as guest editors (Wendy Coxshall and Ana Rojas Acosta) of 'Climate Justice, Food Insecurity and Social Work'. The aggressors in these geopolitical wars and conflicts are imperial powers (old, emergent and waning) that seek to settle, colonise and control natural resources (land, water, oil, gas, minerals, food and seeds) and to destroy indigenous populations – the custodians of biodiversity and life on this planet. This has sparked a rise in fascism and far-right nationalism, as well as a growing and unrelenting groundswell of global resistance movements calling for liberation, equity and social justice. Radical acts of defiance and solidarity to end war, genocide and government complicity have followed, and 'food' has played a critical role. On 23 January 2026, Minnesota declared a 'Day of Truth and Freedom', on which residents boycotted food shops and closed cafes and restaurants to impact on business and force out the US federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents – 'death squads' – responsible for immigration law enforcement and for fatally shooting two civilians. Food has also been used as an act of defiance and solidarity in UK prison hunger strikes since early November 2025.

When I began writing this editorial, four of eight prisoners linked to the Palestine Action group proscribed by the UK government in 2025 had been on collective hunger strikes for over 50 days and up to 60 days (Shamim, 2026). The prisoners were exercising their right to protest and protesting against their prison conditions and time spent on remand while awaiting trial. Four other Palestine Action prisoners had recently ended their hunger strikes, some after hospitalisation (Shamim, 2026). The hunger strikers had five demands: immediate bail, a fair trial, ending censorship of their communications, de-proscribing Palestine Action and the closure of the UK subsidiary of the Israeli weapons group Elbit Systems (Shamim, 2026). Heba Muraisi had refused food for 73 days. She and the other prisoners became critically ill and were close to dying. Then, on the eve of 14 January 2026, three of the prisoners ended

their hunger strikes after one of their key demands was met. They cited a report that Elbit Systems UK had been denied a UK government contract. Notwithstanding, one of the Palestine Action prisoners remains on hunger strike and has stated that he will escalate his demands by refusing water if the other demands are not met. It is incumbent on the UK government to act on the grounds of morality and the ethical principles of human rights, decency and democracy. What could be more urgent and relevant in the current global climate and to the international social work profession?

It was in the context of rising global anti-capitalist and anti-war movements in the 1990s/2000s that *CRSW* was established by Editors-in-Chief Michael Lavalette and Iain Ferguson, in collaboration with the Policy Press and with support from Vasilios Ioakimidis (current *CRSW* editor-in-chief), among others (Lavalette, 2025). The editors called for the social work profession to reaffirm its commitment to social justice and to radical social work. It was a call for community social work and activism in social justice movements. The editors also sought to create a social justice forum for debate to counter the impacts of neoliberalism in social work and reverse the negative shift away from community work, care and welfare support to the 'control', surveillance and punishment of poor individuals, families and marginalised communities (Lavalette, 2025). *CRSW* is a journal committed to hope, belief and critical and radical social work.

I thank Michael Lavalette, Iain Ferguson and Vasilios Ioakimidis (editors) and Sian Durham, Ella Gibbs and Katie Foxall (Policy Press) for their continued commitment to and belief in making this special issue a reality. I also thank all the authors in this special issue for their contributions to knowledge and debates on critical and radical social work and their calls for collectivism and political, anti-racist activism driven by 'radical hope' (Zufferey, 2024) to resist the onslaught of neoliberal capitalism and promote social and structural change. I also thank all the reviewers for their time and considered commentaries on the articles in this special issue.

The authors in this special issue research and amplify marginalised voices and the lived experiences of excluded, silenced and oppressed communities using a variety of research methodologies. In this way, the authors seek to democratise knowledge and knowledge production and diversify and disrupt the dominance of neoliberal discourses and the 'monodirectional' flow of information on how 'natural' resources (water, land and air) are controlled, distributed and used (Hernández et al, 2025).

Capitalism's insatiable drive for capital accumulation relies on ransacking the Earth's resources, thereby threatening life on this planet, human existence and the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable, first and foremost. Climate-related disasters are more extreme and frequent in the Global South, as are poverty, hunger, malnutrition and obesity. The effects of climate change are increasing and intensifying global social inequalities and injustices. Climate change is the greatest global challenge facing humanity in the world today and requires a radical transdisciplinary, interprofessional and anticapitalist response. Radical social work has much to do and much to contribute to this response, and it is incumbent on social work to respond to the climate crisis based on the profession's ethical principles and commitment to human rights and social justice.

The special issue illuminates how global neoliberalism is being driven by a 'super-rich' minority capitalist class that owns and controls media conglomerates and the extractive industries (mining and agro-industry). It shows how the extractive industries and 'extractivist methodologies' (Mabrouk et al, 2026) and 'cultural appropriation,

misrepresentation and/or disrespect' (Trujillo, 2025) are increasing poverty, the unfair distribution of resources and the accumulation of trauma and harm to both racialised and marginalised communities and the Earth's ecologies.

The articles warn that the impacts of neoliberalism persist and are deepening in a global context and in the international profession of social work, despite the now considerable knowledge and debates highlighting neoliberalism's impacts on social work, that is, how social work has been restructured through bureaucratisation, 'professionalisation' and rise of managerialism (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Ferguson, 2017; Lavalette, 2019). This special issue draws attention to how arguments that challenge neoliberalism's impacts on social work are being co-opted, neutralised and marginalised. The articles also caution social workers against becoming (unwittingly) complicit in oppressive systems (Hernández et al, 2025; Rao and Kaiser, 2025) and in the use of 'universal' assessment tools that are not neutral but, rather, politically and culturally specific (Mabrouk et al, 2026).

The articles are clear: critical and radical social work must continue to disrupt and resist the 'myth of neutrality' (Mabrouk et al, 2026) in social work and engage in collective activism to halt neoliberalism's onslaught and damage to marginalised communities and the Earth's ecologies. This requires a 'sustained commitment to justice' (Mabrouk et al, 2026) by the international social work profession and a radical paradigm shift from individualism to collectivism and from control to care and solidarity with oppressed and disenfranchised communities and settler colonies: indigenous and 'First Nations' peoples; the landless, peasants and small farmers (Coxshall, 2025; Rao and Kaiser, 2025); and refugees, the displaced and unhoused (Gambardella and Rojas Acosta, 2025; Moratilla, 2025).

Environmental resources

This special issue begins with Winzen and Haupt's (2024) comparative analysis of environmental discourses used by practitioners and the paradigms used to inform and produce social work professional documents and resources, with particular reference to social work professional organisations in the US and Germany. Winzen and Haupt (2024) highlight social work professional organisations' influential role in translating and communicating how environmental research and discourses should be applied in everyday practice through professional publications and pedagogical resources (podcasts and professional trade journals). Their findings reflect stark differences. In Germany, an emphasis was placed on strengthening environmental laws and policies and on political and paradigmatic differences. German social work organisation documents and resources also tended to criticise the German government and environmental discourses that focused on individual responsibility and, instead, called for collective responses, and they encouraged social workers to make connections across social work organisations, movements and environmental organisations. Winzen and Haupt (2024) also highlight how the German social work organisations' publications and resources emphasised the importance of social work ethics, professional identity and the need for social workers to advocate for stronger environmental laws and policies. By contrast, Winzen and Haupt (2024) found a distinct trend in environmental discourses articulated by US social work professional organisations, which rather focused on individual responsibility and responses to environmental change by the social work profession in the US. In their findings, however, Winzen and Haupt (2024) also note

that US social work professional organisations were more effective in communicating environmental discourses to social work practitioners, pitching the environmental discourses and resources to match the knowledge base and conceptual approaches among social work practitioners in the US.

Restorative justice and indigenous healing

In her article, Trujillo (2025) focuses on restorative justice and indigenous healing. She critically discusses the implications and meanings of the terms 'indigenous', 'decolonisation' and 'restoration'. She explores the epistemologies, ontologies and paradigmatic shift required for social work to move from biomedicine and individualised discourses of health, illness and 'treatment' to indigenous social work based on indigenous, collective ways of knowing, being and healing. Trujillo (2025) focuses on four core features of indigenous healing: 'all my relations', 'land', 'stories' and 'practices'. She emphasises the need to recognise the impacts of 'historical trauma', the weight of the colonial past and the paramountcy of 'cultural survival' among indigenous peoples. Trujillo (2025) recognises Indigenous social work as 'sacred work' and recognises 'deep vulnerability' and 'radical humanness' as strengths in indigenous healing. She contrasts indigenous healing, as well as the possibilities it offers for externalising pain, with the shame, stigma and harms caused to indigenous and racialised communities by the 'Western' biomedical model and system. Trujillo (2025) recognises the significance of land restoration for restorative justice and 'storytelling' as an ancient indigenous and intergenerational form of knowledge exchange and healing. She highlights the disregard for 'stories' that have also been co-opted and repackaged as 'narrative therapy' – a relatively recent therapeutic concept associated with 'biopsychosocial' approaches to health and well-being that have become incorporated into (neoliberal) social work theories and practices (2025: 6–7).

Food justice, land justice and housing justice

Rao and Kaiser's (2025), Coxshall's (2025) and McLafferty Bell's (2024) articles each explore the causes of climate injustices through the lens of the global food system, racial and structural inequalities, food sovereignty, and land justice. In their article, Rao and Kaiser (2025) select and connect three cases across scales: local (anticapitalist 'solidarity economy' model in Mississippi, USA), national (state-institutionalised agroecology in Cuba) and global ('animal agriculture' and its centrality in the global food system and contribution to the production of global emissions and ecological harm). They ask and explore what social work might learn from community knowledge and place-based models of food production, resource distribution and ecologically responsive practices. They explore the potential for community-based, solidarity economies and food justice. They explore and engage with notions of 'degrowth' and a 'just transition' as alternatives to the global capitalist food system driven by growth. The authors caution social workers against complicity in oppressive and racially and ecologically harmful systems. The need for racial justice and land justice is highlighted, as well as social work activism and solidarity with the 'land back' movement in the US and social work engagement with the People's Charter for Eco-Social Work.

Coxshall's (2025) article calls for the eco-social work paradigm shift to be 'radical' and take a transformative approach to address climate injustices based on the right to

food, 'emancipating agroecologies', food sovereignty, 'genuine' land reform and global movements based on trans-environmentalism, radical activism and anticapitalism. Fraser's (2022) analysis of current capitalism and the interconnections between today's global crises and capitalism's growing dependence on unpaid care (reproductive labour), performed mainly by women, is discussed, as well as the implications for women, gender equality and social work. Agroecology's holistic integrated dimensions as a science, practice and movement are highlighted, as well as the ways 'agroecology' has been revised and depoliticised by dominant, neoliberal development discourses. The article illuminates the potential of La Via Campesina (Landworkers' Alliance) as a radical global agrarian movement based on agroecology and food sovereignty, prioritising women's (land) rights and participation, and Global South–Global North 'peasant to peasant' (small farmer to small farmer) knowledge exchanges, as well as the movement's struggle for climate justice and emancipation. The author asks what the UK (Global North) can learn from Andean agroecology about food sovereignty, land reform and climate mitigation. The article highlights the significance of the UK monarchy and aristocracy in the perpetuation of land injustices and deepening UK poverty and inequality. It argues for women, social workers and land workers to unite through participation in global agrarian and anticapitalist movements for social change and liberation.

McLafferty Bell's (2024) article is based on research during COVID-19 in his own community in Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA. It explores how marginalised agrarian practices among food growers might contribute to collectively surviving the climate crisis. McLafferty Bell (2024) amplifies the voices of his research participants through the extensive inclusion of recorded research interviews. He highlights the racial inequalities and injustices experienced by the marginalised community and mainly 'Black' population, who live in a 'food apartheid', with limited access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food located in remote and distant food stores. McLafferty Bell (2024) highlights the connections between food sovereignty, racial justice, land justice and housing justice. Through the voices of his research participants, McLafferty Bell (2024) highlights the rise of poverty, precarity and inequality before and especially during the pandemic, as well as their intensification through gentrification and inflated local property prices since the local area was identified as a future 'climate refuge', whose residents will be protected from the harsher effects of climate change.

Moratilla's (2025) article is a critical ethnography of a church-based food programme in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines. Moratilla (2025) clearly establishes that structural neglect causes homelessness, which is also a sign of 'abject poverty' and housing injustice. He presents the scale of homelessness in the Philippines (14.5 million people) and discusses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on precarious workers, who fell into (increased) poverty and homelessness. It is shown that climate-related disasters in the Philippines may be extreme and large-scale and lead to mass internal displacement and homelessness. Moratilla (2025) illuminates how the complexity and conditionality of family relations have also led to individuals falling in and out of homelessness as they have fluctuated in and out of work and poverty. Moratilla (2025) also recognises homeless people as being 'unhoused' and as a particular stigmatised and marginalised community associated with ideas of contagion, violence and substance misuse, whose members are often nameless and publicly reviled. Moratilla (2025) recounts his research participants' personal lived experiences and the circumstances that caused and contributed to their prolonged homelessness and poverty. They are

stories of personal loss, tragedy and family- and climate-related disasters that Moratilla (2025) recognises can have intergenerational consequences. In his critical ethnography, Moratilla (2025) demonstrates the morality and values of his research subjects and the homeless community, who he shows regulate their behaviours and, he argues, also employ 'technologies of self' (Foucault, 1988) for their own (and collective) survival.

Socio-natural disasters, social work and situated knowledge and practice

The articles by Hernández et al (2025) and Gambardella and Rojas Acosta (2025) are situated in Chile and Brazil, respectively. Both recognise that 'disasters' are socio-environmental, produced and shaped by persisting social and structural inequalities and poverty. Gambardella and Rojas Acosta (2025) also emphasise that categorising disasters by type (flood, fire or drought) is problematic. Rather, both articles highlight how 'disasters' are situated and occur more often in poorer regions and poorer rural and (peri-)urban areas and that 'disasters' also more often and most intensely impact marginalised communities (women, older people, children and refugees) living in those regions and areas with limited infrastructure and access to public services. They also note the health inequalities and cumulative effects of socio-environmental disasters. In Brazil, Gambardella and Rojas Acosta (2025) highlight how floods led to the internal displacement of Venezuelan refugees who had settled in poorer northern regions and peri-urban areas. Gambardella and Rojas Acosta (2025) advocate for the use of 'social welfare surveillance', the need for social protection and a state 'masterplan' to anticipate, prevent and develop targeted responses for particular marginalised communities living in poorer rural and (peri-)urban areas and biomes. They call for the statutory implementation of policy frameworks 'on the ground' to inform 'disaster' responses and highlight the need for social workers to develop situated knowledge and practices that recognise the social inequalities and needs of the marginalised communities living in and most vulnerable to and affected by the impacts of socio-environmental 'disasters'.

Water justice: drought, water governance and neoliberalism

Hernández et al's (2025) article focuses on water justice, the centrality of water in almost all disasters and the relationship between hydro-social injustices and the privatisation established under Chile's 1981 Water Code. It explores hydro-social injustices in the context of colonial and extractivist environments. The article is based on a discourse analysis of media narratives in online news stories in the Choapa and Petorca provinces in Chile's central region, affected by Chile's 'Mega-Drought' – a drought, which the authors highlight, began in 2014 and has also been recognised as the worst in the region for 700 years. Hernández et al (2025) expose how hegemonic narratives perpetuate and retrench dominant narratives that privilege the interests of the capitalist class, who own and control the media and extractive industries. They draw attention to 'hyper-climatisation' (2025: 5) in dominant media narratives, which emphasise 'water scarcity' and point to climate change as the cause (2025: 15). These narratives, the authors argue, eclipse and silence alternative voices and debates on water conservation and water rights, as well as water governance, uses and distribution. The authors also discuss how dominant media narratives present 'water saving' as a

domestic issue that also obscures discourses and debates on 'poor water administration' (2025: 6) and water use in mining that forms part of the dominant neoliberal and 'extractivist development matrix' (2025: 7). Hernández et al (2025) emphasise the need to focus on conserving and not fragmenting the significant freshwater reserves that flow through water basins in a complex networked system. They caution social workers not to be complicit in perpetuating and reproducing dominant 'hyper-climatisation' discourses on 'water scarcity' that also discuss water as a commodity and economic resource. The authors provide clear guidance on how social workers can avoid complicity in dominant media and neoliberal narratives. They warn against short-term thinking and emergency disaster responses and call for long-term state solutions to the hydro-social injustices in Chile and globally. Water justice, they also emphasise, is a human and non-human right.

Neoliberalism, state violence and social work

Neoliberalism, it should be remembered, was first implemented under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile during the 1970s and a 'neoliberal experiment' in the Reagan–Thatcher alliance, which led to neoliberalism in the US and UK from the early 1980s. Neoliberalism was also implemented in the Philippines following the People Power Revolution in 1986 and end of the Marcos regime. Under neoliberalism, states have been stripped back but also stepped up at times, as well as stepped (further) back during times of crisis, such as to bail out banks after the 2008 financial crash and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. State violence persists and has escalated, and states have been accused of carrying out genocides (the Israeli state against Palestinians in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since October 2023; the Peruvian state against Andean protesters in December 2023; US federal ICE agents against civilians in Minnesota state; and the UK state against prison hunger strikers).

In their article, Mabrouk et al (2026) boldly and courageously argue against the 'universality' and 'neutrality' that they expose as harmful and intrinsic features of neoliberalism that depoliticise and are unethical. The 'myth of neutrality', they highlight, is being perpetuated in the social work profession through notions of 'professionalism' based on fake notions of scientific 'objectivity' in social work assessments and the ways they are carried out, as well as social work professional frameworks that are political and cultural products, not 'neutral', objective or based on 'universal' truths. The authors take a critical approach to the ways anti-oppression and anti-racism have become embedded, co-opted and neutralised in social work ethical codes and frameworks, and they strongly reject that anti-racism is an ideology imposed on social work. They set out the established theories and arguments in 'Black' scholarship: Freire's (1970) three levels of consciousness; Fanon's (1952) arguments about 'everyday racial domination and internalised inferiority' that 'produce profound psychic injury and clinical presentations'; and critical race theory. They point to the impacts of 'racial capitalism, state violence and institutional betrayal' that does 'collective harm' (Mabrouk et al, 2026: 11) and adds to historical trauma. Mabrouk et al (2026) argue that a radical epistemic paradigm shift is required based on collectivism, not individualism, and that centres Black scholarship and exceeds critical analysis, which alone is 'ethically insufficient' (2026: 2) and must be harnessed and transformed into critical action, structurally trauma-informed praxis and 'a sustained commitment to justice' (2026: 11).

This also calls for 'radicalising hope', which Zufferey (2024) argues in her article is needed to 'resist the neoliberalisation of social work'. Zufferey (2024) explores critical approaches to 'hope' (definitions and critiques) across different disciplines and highlights social work's limited engagement with 'hope' and 'critical hope'. Zufferey (2024) explores the critical terminologies of 'hope' in Duncan-Andrade's (2009) research among Black and Latino urban young people – 'hokey hope', 'fake hope', the 'myth of hope' and the 'denial of hope' – which Zufferey (2024) emphasises are 'ahistorical' and 'depoliticised'. In contrast, Zufferey (2024) highlights the following: 'Socratic hope' that questions societal injustice; 'audacious hope' that stands in solidarity with the oppressed; and 'restorative hope' against punitive approaches, which is redemptive and about the interrelated and collective responsibility of all 'to create the conditions for all people and communities to thrive' (2024: 9), heal and coexist on this planet.

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